**PREPARING FOR YOUR CUSTODY CASE**

Today, it can no longer be assumed that the mother will get custody of the children. Instead, what judges consider during a custody trial is based on the "best interests of the child(ren)", and they try to give custody to the parent who will provide the best environment and upbringing for the children.

To win your child custody case, you will need to prove to the judge that it is in the best interest of the children to be with you. In preparing for a custody case, be aware that your parenting skills and daily interactions with your children will be thoroughly inspected by a judge. Just telling the judge that you are a good parent won't be enough. You need provide documentation and testimony from witnesses to back up your parental capabilities.

Keeping detailed, consistent records is critically important in child custody battles. You need to be prepared to show the judge that you have gone out of your way to nurture and care for your children. Because there is so much at stake, you also need to document any short-comings of your spouse that would be relevant to the custody case.

There are a number of ways that you can prove that you are a better parent. Below are some ideas:

* Record activities with your children on a daily basis to help show that you are heavily involved in your children's life on a continuing basis. (Keep a calendar - print it out on a computer to be used as evidence).
* Attend all (or as many) school activities, such as parent-teacher meetings, assemblies, school plays, and musicals as you can. Try to interact with your child's teacher and office support staff in an ongoing manner. Keep record of all the activities that you attend.
* Be the parent who takes your child to the doctor and dentist. This will help support that you are a nurturing parent, plus provide witnesses that will testify that you are the parent who brought the children in most often.
* Foster your child's involvement in church and family activities. This will help prove that you are providing for your child's moral upbringing.
* Take your children on vacations and outings to show that you spend quality time with your children. If possible take pictures and keep mementos for extra documentation.
* Get witnesses who have observed you interact with your child over a long period of time to support that you are a good parent. This includes relatives, teachers, doctors, child-care workers, neighbors, and friends. ***~~Have them complete Affidavits (attached)~~***~~.~~
  + *~~Affidavits may be used in temporary hearings.~~*
  + *Ask witnesses if they would be willing to attend the hearing and testify for permanent hearings and modifications.*
* Provide your child with a clean, safe environment. Take pictures of your home, your child’s bedroom, your yard. Items they may play with (such as bikes, scooters, swing sets, computers, video game systems, etc.).
* Create a custody calendar – documenting when you and the other parent have time with the child.
* Keep a copy of all texts, e-mails, facebook (or other social networking postings) of the other parent, and write down comments the other parents makes in a journal to preserve for evidence.
* Anything else you may think is helpful but not irrelevant or overburdensome.
* **Provide all of the above to your attorney at least three weeks before the scheduled date for your hearing.**

While you need to emphasize that you are a good parent, you may also need to document the poor performance of your spouse with your children. Documentation on your spouse might include:

* Evidence of an overwhelming work schedule that restricts interaction with the children,
* Interference with custody, visitation times, or failure to pay temporary support for the children,
* Incidences of domestic violence, such as police records, photos of bruises, etc,
* DWI convictions, jail time, or proof of drug use,
* Evidence of mental illness,
* Activities that might endanger or could be detrimental to the child,
* Any comments the children have made about neglectful, inappropriate, alienating or abusive forms of parenting by the other parent,
* Cohabitating or exposing the children to over-night stays with a significant other.

# DRAW YOUR FAMILY TREE (Begin with your children and work down from there).

# DRAW THE TIME LINE OF YOUR CHILDREN’S LIVES (Note any earlier separations, potential domestic violence episodes, extra-marital affairs, etc…):

# TELL ME ABOUT YOURSELF (Get everything good, from church to school, good employment records to criminal charges)

# TELL ME ABOUT THE CHILDREN’S FATHER:

# TELL ME ABOUT THE KID(S) (School records, medical history, mannerisms):

# OTHER THOUGHTS OR THINGS YOU WOULD LIKE ME TO KNOW:

# WHAT IS IT THAT YOU REALLY WANT TO SEE HAPPEN IN THIS CASE?

# (In order of importance):

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.